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ABSTRACT

In winter 1995, Schoolcraft College, in Michigan, conducted a study to determine reasons why fall 1994 students withdrew from classes. Telephone interviews were conducted with 100 students who withdrew from at least one course and data on student characteristics were collected from student transcripts. Study results included the following: (1) the main reasons cited by students were personal or family (19%), working too many hours (19%), job schedule change (14%), and dissatisfied with instruction (14%); (2) the average grade point average (GPA) of the students was 2.79; (3) approximately 40% of the students were working full-time, while 25% were not working at all; (4) 41% were taking courses for a degree in a career program, while 46% were planning to transfer to a four-year college or university; (5) 41% indicated that they tended to drop classes regularly; (6) 86% rated their educational experience at the college as excellent or good; (7) no significant difference was found between student major, employment, GPA, educational goal, or rating of educational experience and the tendency to drop classes; (8) 59% planned to re-enroll in winter 1995 and 83% plan to enroll sometime in the future; and (9) 29% of students dropped courses for reasons beyond the college's control, such as illness, personal, or family issues. Recommendations for improving retention based on findings include having students complete a short survey when they drop a class, conducting regular follow-ups to encourage withdrawals to continue their studies, and designing courses and programs to meet the needs of working students. (KP)

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Student Withdrawal Study, Schoolcraft College

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Student Withdrawal Study

Fall 1994 Semester Students - Conducted in Winter 1995

Requested by: Louis A. Reibling

Survey and Data Entry Conducted by: Christine Burns

Research Report Written by: Denise Sigworth

Background

Schoolcraft College has in place a process by which it collects data on the reasons why students withdraw from courses. The Registrar asks each student to complete a form which lists several reasons for the withdrawal. The student selects those responses which best explain the reason for dropping the class. Analysis was conducted on this data in 1988 which shows the percentage of students' reasons for dropping a class.

Table 1 Reasons for dropping courses in 1988 study

18%	Working too many hours
14%	Low grades
13%	Dissatisfied with instruction
12%	Job schedule change
12%	Missed too many classes
9%	Personal family reasons
5%	Lacked background skills
5%	Other
4%	Illness/Injury
4%	Dissatisfied with content
2%	Transportation problems
2%	Financial reasons

Source: Survey of Student Withdrawal from Courses, Student Services

Purpose

In the winter semester of 1995, a study was requested to gather more in-depth information on why students withdraw from classes. The purpose of the study was two-fold: one, to collect qualitative data on the reasons students withdraw and identify variables which might describe the student who withdraws; and two, to conduct marketing and outreach activities.

Related Literature

Two studies were selected from the literature to compare Schoolcraft College's withdrawal rates and the reasons that students withdraw from classes. The first was from Pima Community College in Arizona. In analyzing fall 1993 grades, Attinasi (1994) compared

the grade distribution of each of the five Pima Community College campuses. Gender, age, location, and ethnicity were the variables studied to compare success and non-success. The Community campus showed the highest percentage of success (75%). Asians had the highest success rate, there were higher success and lower withdrawal rates for females than for males, and students over 40 showed the highest percentage of passing grades at 78%. The official withdrawal rate was 13% (based upon a grade distribution list of seats filled) district-wide. Schoolcraft's withdrawal rate was also 13% for Fall 1993. Pima Community College has a system by which students can "officially" withdraw (13%) or can receive a "general" withdrawal (12%).

Lucas and Maltesen (1993) conducted a study at William Rainey Harper College in Illinois to develop a profile of students who withdrew from courses between summer 1990 and spring 1992. For the two-year period, each degree credit student who had officially withdrawn from a course was asked to complete a survey form. Between 1990 and 1992, 13.4% of the 170,000 course enrollments resulted in official withdrawals. The results indicated that: 1) one out of every five course withdrawals resulted in complete withdrawal from the college, although three-fourths planned to return in the future; 2) nearly 30% gave reasons outside of the college's control; 3) the major reasons cited for withdrawals included personal, family or health problems; 4) there are lower withdrawals in summer; 5) about 40% of withdrawing students had never consulted a counselor; and 6) overall younger students continued to have a higher withdrawal rate than students over the age of 25.

Methodology

The Dean of Instruction requested 100 randomly selected transcripts of students who withdrew from a class in the Fall semester of 1994. Some students had only withdrawn from one course while others had withdrawn from all their courses. The select criteria did not differentiate these students. The only criteria was that they had withdrawn from at least one course during the proscribed time period.

A set of thirteen questions was designed for a phone survey. Two individuals phoned students to complete the questionnaire. After three weeks, it was evident that not all 100 students could be reached. It was decided to request another 100 randomly selected students and add them to the potential pool. In total, 200 transcripts were received and 100 students were contacted. This resulted in a confidence level of plus or minus 10%.

The questions were designed to collect descriptive and analytical data about student withdrawals. The first purpose of the study was to find out the reasons why students withdraw and if there are common variables among students who tend to withdraw. The first question asked students why they withdrew from a course. There were 13 possible responses and these included "other" and "no response". The interviewers were encouraged to probe for as detailed a response as possible. The question, "Are there any other reasons?" was entered in the database with the "other" responses by the data entry person.

Variables which were collected to determine if these students had characteristics in common included employment, hours working, taking prerequisite classes, whether they tended to drop classes regularly, when they stopped attending classes, and when they officially dropped. Hypotheses were developed based upon these variables.

In addition, some information was entered into a database from transcript records. This information included GPA, the number of withdrawals, the first semester at Schoolcraft, the number of semesters at Schoolcraft, whether the student had a degree from Schoolcraft, credit hours completed, transfer credit hours, and total credit hours.

Several statistical tests are run which compare student characteristics and the rates of students dropping classes. Two variables are available to use in testing the hypotheses on the drop rate of students. The first is the actual number of drops that were counted from student transcripts. The second is whether students self-reported that they tend to regularly drop courses. A t-test for independent samples was run which indicated that students who stated that they tended to drop classes regularly did indeed have more withdrawals on their transcripts. These two variables were both used to study student characteristics.

The second purpose of the study was to conduct marketing and outreach activities. Questions on future enrollment plans, rating of educational experience, and changes the students think the College needs to make were included in the survey. The data from the surveys were entered on a FileMaker Pro database, exported to an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed by SPSS Mac Version.

Research Questions

There are several questions which the survey seeks to answer:

- 1) What are the main reasons that students drop classes?
- 2) What are the characteristics of students who drop classes?
- 3) Are students who have not declared a major more likely to drop classes on a regular basis than those who have a major?
- 4) Are students who work full-time more likely to drop classes than those who do not work?
- 5) Are students with low GPAs more likely to regularly drop classes than those with high GPAs?
- 6) When do students tend to stop attending classes and when do they officially drop classes? What is the gap between these two times?
- 7) Are students who are enrolled for individual courses more likely to drop classes than those students seeking a degree?
- 8) How many students plan to return in the winter semester? How many plan to return sometime in the future?
- 9) Is there a significant difference between students who were satisfied and those who were not and their plans to enroll in the future?

Results

- 1) What are the main reasons that students drop classes?

The following chart provides percentage responses for each of the reasons that students gave for dropping a class in fall semester:

Table 2 **Reasons for dropping classes**

%	Topic Area	Rank	Rank of this topic in 1988 study
19%	Personal/family reasons	1	6
19%	Working too many hours	2	1
14%	Job schedule change	3	5
14%	Dissatisfied with instruction	4	3
13%	Other:	5	10
9%	Missed too many classes	6	4
9%	Illness or injury	7	9
5%	Low grades	8	2
4%	Lacked background skills	9	7
4%	Dissatisfied with content	10	8
1%	Financial Reasons	11	12
0%	Transportation problems	12	11

Source: Withdrawal Survey

As indicated in Table 2, at least one-third of all drops were work related. Another 28% were personal and outside of Schoolcraft's control. There were 18% of the students who stated "dissatisfied with instruction or content." The responses (all are attached verbatim to this report) under "other" included such things as

*I had too much going on.
I felt I didn't need this class.
I wasn't learning anything.
I was not doing well.
I didn't have time.
There was too much class work.*

2) What are the characteristics of students who drop classes?

Each transcript of the population surveyed was studied and data was entered into a database. The average GPA of these 100 students was 2.79. Over half of the students in the study had enrolled prior to winter 1992, although the greatest percentage was 15% in fall 1993.

Approximately 40% of the students in the study are working full-time and approximately 25% are not working at all. The other one-third are employed on a part-time basis. Of those employed, the average number of hours being worked is 37 hours per week.

Students in the study were generally taking courses to seek a degree in a career program (41%) or planning to transfer to a four year college or university (46%).

The students tended to take required prerequisites for the courses they dropped (50% said yes, they took them, and another 21% said they were not required). There were 29% who stated that they did not take the prerequisite.

There were 41% of the students who indicated that they tended to drop classes regularly.

There were 86% of the students who rated their educational experience at Schoolcraft College as "excellent" or "good". Only four percent rated it fair or below average.

Table 3 Characteristics of Students in the Study

Characteristics	Response
Average GPA	2.79
Students working full-time	40%
Student not working at all	25%
Employed part-time	35%
Average hours worked	37 per week
Seeking career degree	41%
Planning to transfer	46%
Took prerequisites	50%
Tend to drop regularly	41%
Rated SC as excellent or good	86%

3) Are students who have not declared a major more likely to drop classes on a regular basis than those who have a major?

The students who participated in the study varied in their major areas. The most prevalent major (22%) was undeclared. The Registrar's Report for fall 1994 indicated that 18% of all the traditional students were undeclared, which coincides with the randomly selected sample. The following list shows the percentage of each major:

Table 4 Student majors in study

Undeclared	22%
Liberal Arts	16%
Nursing	8%
General Business	6%
Secondary Ed.	5%
Nursing Transfer	5%
Engineering	5%
Accounting Transfer	5%
CAD	4%
Business Adm. Transfer	3%
Electronic Technology	2%
Culinary Arts	2%
Computer Graphic Technology	2%
Computer Information Systems	2%
Secretarial Administration	1%
Theater Transfer	1%
Metallurgy	1%
Practical Nursing	1%
Elementary Education	1%
Physical Therapy Transfer	1%
Occupational Therapy	1%
Pre-Law	1%
Child Care Cert.	1%
Small Business Mgmt.	1%
Marketing & Applied Mgmt.	1%
Accounting	1%
Basic Business	1%

The group was divided into three groups: Group 1 = undecided, Group 2 = occupational and Group 3 = transfer programs. In the undecided group there were 22 students, 33 in the occupational programs, and 45 in transfer programs. The difference in numbers in Table 5 is that some students did not answer question 6 and were counted as "missing" from the chart below.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between students' major and their response to whether they regularly drop classes.

Table 5 Major group by tend to drop regularly

		Q6		Page 1 of 1	
		Do you tend to drop?			
		Yes	No	Row	
		1.0	2.0	Total	
MAJGRP	Undecided	1.0	7	14	21
					22.1
Occupational	2.0	13	19		32
					33.7
Transfer	3.0	21	21		42
					44.2
Column		41	54	95	
Total		43.2	56.8	100.0	
Chi-Square		Value	DF	Significance	
Pearson		1.71143	2	.42498	
Likelihood Ratio		1.72573	2	.42195	
Mantel-Haenszel		1.68451	1	.19433	

Minimum Expected Frequency = 9.063

Number of Missing Observations: 5
Source: Withdrawal Survey

The chart indicates that there is no significant difference between students' major and their response to whether they regularly drop classes.

4) Are students who work full-time more likely to drop classes than those who do not work?

A t-test was run to determine the difference of the number of W's on students' transcripts and whether they were employed or not (question 11).

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between students who work and those who do not and the number of withdrawals on their transcript.

Table 6 Number of withdrawals by employment status

t-tests for Independent Samples of Q11 employed

Variable	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
WTHDRW # of withdrawals				
YES Employed	80	3.2125	3.496	.391
NO	19	4.8421	8.368	1.920

Mean Difference = -1.6296

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances: F= 3.793 P= .054

t-test for Equality of Means					95%
Variances	t-value	df	2-Tail Sig	SE of Diff	CI for Diff
Equal	-1.33	97	.186	1.223	(-4.056, .797)
Unequal	-.83	19.52	.416	1.959	(-5.723, 2.464)

Source: Withdrawal Study

Although students who are not employed tended to have a higher average of drops (4.84) than students who work (3.21), the probability was slightly greater than .05 and therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

A chi-square also indicates that there is no significant difference between students who work and those who do not and whether they reported that they tend to drop classes regularly.

Table 7 Employed by tend to drop regularly

Q6 Page 1 of 1				
Count				
Drop Regularly				
YES NO Row				
1.00 2.00 Total				
Q11	1.00	32	46	78
Employed				83.0
	2.00	8	8	16
Not Employed				17.0
Column	40	54	94	
Total	42.6	57.4	100.0	
Chi-Square	Value		DF	Significance
Pearson	.43742		1	.50837
Continuity Correction	.14733		1	.70110
Likelihood Ratio	.43361		1	.51023
Mantel-Haenszel test for linear association	.43276		1	.51064
Minimum Expected Frequency -	6.809			

Source: Withdrawal Study

5) Are students with low GPAs more likely to regularly drop classes than those with high GPAs?

Students were divided into two groups: "pass", including those with a GPA equal to or greater than 2.0 and "fail", including those with a GPA less than 2.0. A crosstab was run which compared the "pass" and the "fail" students with their response (yes or no) to whether they tended to drop classes on a regular basis.

Hypothesis: There is no difference between low and high GPA students and whether they tend to drop classes.

Table 8 Pass-fail by tend to drop regularly

		Q6 Tend to Drop Regularly		Row Total
Count		YES	NO	
PF Fail	1.00	3	8	11
				11.6
Pass	2.00	38	46	84
				88.4
Column Total		41	54	95
		43.2	56.8	100.0

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	1.27965	1	.25796
Continuity Correction	.65209	1	.41936
Likelihood Ratio	1.33680	1	.24760
Mantel-Haenszel test for linear association	1.26618	1	.26049
Fisher's Exact Test:			
One-Tail			.21168
Two-Tail			.34033

Minimum Expected Frequency = 4.747
Cells with Expected Frequency < 5 = 1 OF 4 (25.0%)
Source: Withdrawal Survey

The Chi-Square statistic indicates that there is no difference between low and high GPA students and whether they tend to drop classes.

6) When do students tend to stop attending classes and when do they officially drop classes? What is the gap between these two times?

Students were asked two questions: "which week of the semester did you stop attending the class" and "which week of the semester did you officially drop the class." We assume that students stop attending and immediately go to the registrar's office to withdraw. These

two questions help us test that theory. Overall, students tended to forget when they stopped attending class (24%). (This survey was done the next semester after the drop.) The following chart from the survey helps compare reported times:

Table 9 Students self-report of when they stopped attending and when they officially dropped

Week	Stopped Attending	Cumulative	Officially Withdrew	Cumulative
One	4%	4%	1%	1%
Two	5%	9%	2%	3%
Three	13%	22%	6%	9%
Four	7%	29%	7%	16%
Five	8%	37%	2%	18%
Six	6%	43%	4%	22%
Seven	4%	47%	3%	25%
Eight	11%	58%	8%	33%
Nine	0%	58%	0%	33%
Ten	2%	60%	7%	40%
Eleven	0%	60%	0%	40%
Twelve	2%	62%	2%	42%
Thirteen	3%	65%	11%	53%
Fourteen	10%	75%	14%	67%
Fifteen	1%	76%	2%	69%
Sixteen	0%	76%	2%	71%
Don't Remember	24%	100%	29%	100%

Source: Withdrawal Survey

There was a wide variety of responses to the question, "Which week of the semester did you stop attending the class? The chart shows that of those students who remembered when they stopped attending class, they tended to stop going to class in weeks three, eight, and fourteen.

It is important to note that over half of the students have already stopped attending class by the eighth week while it isn't until the thirteenth week that half of them have officially dropped the class.

7) Are students who are enrolled for individual courses more likely to drop classes than those students seeking a degree?

A crosstab was run based upon survey information from question 6 (do you tend to regularly drop courses?) and question 7 (describe the reason you are taking courses at Schoolcraft).

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in students who are taking individual courses and those seeking degrees and whether they reported that they tend to regularly drop classes.

Table 10 Goal by tend to drop regularly

		Q6 Tend to Drop Regularly		Page 1 of 1
Count		YES	NO	
		1.00	2.00	Row Total
GOAL				
1.00		15	25	40
seeking degree				43.0
2.00		24	29	53
ind. courses				57.0
Column		39	54	93
Total		41.9	58.1	100.0

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.56710	1	.45142
Continuity Correction	.29250	1	.58862
Likelihood Ratio	.56916	1	.45059
Mantel-Haenszel test for linear association	.56100	1	.45386

Minimum Expected Frequency = 16.774

Number of Missing Observations: 7
Source: Withdrawal Survey

The Pearson Chi-Square statistic was greater than .05, therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. The accepted hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in students who are taking individual courses and those seeking degrees and whether they reported that they tend to regularly drop classes.

8) How many students plan to return in the winter semester? How many plan to return sometime in the future?

The marketing potential for Schoolcraft even with students who drop classes is positive. There were 59% who planned on taking classes the winter semester of '95 and a full 83% plan to enroll sometime in the future. Of those who knew when they were planning to return, approximately half of them planned to enroll in Spring '95 and the other half in Fall '95. If the students did not plan to enroll in the future, they were asked "why not", and their comments follow:

Work (6)
I transferred to another college. (6)
Illness (4)
Money (4)
No response (3)
I don't have time. (3)
Change of shift at work. (2)
I am taking a break.
I need to talk to an advisor.
I didn't need to take classes.
I own a business.
I am just taking classes that interest me.
I am a single parent and it's too hard.
I am waiting until my children get older.

9) Is there a significant difference between students who were satisfied and those who were not and their plans to enroll in the future?

Students were divided into two groups based upon their ratings of their educational experiences here at Schoolcraft. Those that rated the college "good" or "excellent" were grouped together (81%) and those that rated the college "average" or below were grouped together (8%). Some students were "missing" since they failed to answer the question on returning to Schoolcraft in the future.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between students who rated their educational experience "good" or "excellent" and those who rated it "average" or below and whether they were planning to take classes in the future.

Table 11 Plan to enroll by rating of education experience

		EDRATE		Page 1 of 1
Count		1.00	2.00	Row Total
Q10	1.00	74	6	80
	2.00	7	1	8
YES				90.9
NO				9.1
Column Total		81	7	88
		92.0	8.0	100.0

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.24832	1	.61826
Continuity Correction	.00000	1	1.00000
Likelihood Ratio	.21794	1	.64062
Mantel-Haenszel test for linear association	.24550	1	.62026
Fisher's Exact Test:			
One-Tail			.49960
Two-Tail			.49960

Minimum Expected Frequency -	.636		
Cells with Expected Frequency < 5 -	1 OF	4 (25.0%)	

Number of Missing Observations: 12
Source: Withdrawal Survey

The Pearson Chi-Square is greater than .05 so the null hypothesis is accepted. The statistic indicates that there is no significant difference between students who rated their educational experience "good" or "excellent" and those who rated it "average" or below and whether they were planning to take classes in the future.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, there were no significant inferential findings in this study. Students tend to drop classes for a myriad of reasons, which are as varied as the individuals themselves. For example, one student who was randomly selected for the study had withdrawn from 38 courses. The student had a G.P.A. of 3.9 and had successfully completed 157 credit hours. The student had attempted 296 credit hours. And, the student had not yet graduated. The reason for dropping courses was "personal". Perhaps this student is not typical but is somewhat described in the publication, *The Way We Are* (Adelman, 1992). *The community college functioned in a variety of "occasional" roles in the lives of individuals. It accommodated their decisions to engage in learning on their own terms, and in their own time. Even if students were constrained by poor academic preparation or*

economic circumstances, they seemed to make of the community college what they wanted to make of it.

Comparisons of Schoolcraft College data with studies from both other colleges and internal time studies indicate that Schoolcraft students drop at the same rate and for many of the same reasons as other community college students. The withdrawal rate itself for Schoolcraft (13% fall 1993) is the same as for Pima Community College (13% fall 1993) and Rainey Harper (13%). Schoolcraft had a higher rate of failing grades than Pima (13% vs. 6%) but Schoolcraft had more grades of "B's" and "C's". Pima, as indicated in the Related Literature section, has a system by which students are withdrawn (12%), therefore removing students who would have "failed" according to Schoolcraft's policy.

As for the reasons that students drop, the Rainey Harper study indicated that 30% of the reasons were outside of their control (illness, personal, family) and it is the same for Schoolcraft (29% stated illness, personal or family as a reason for withdrawal).

Comparing baseline data with the 1988 Schoolcraft Withdrawal Study, the findings indicated that the most prevalent reason for dropping classes is still work-related, and dissatisfaction with instruction continues to be chosen by 13% of the students.

Student majors (undecided, occupational or transfer), employment, success/non-success (based on GPA), and goal at Schoolcraft (degree-seeking or taking individual courses) did not seem to make a difference whether students tended to regularly drop classes. It seems disheartening to find no significant differences between students who tend to drop classes regularly and those who do not. However, significant differences may need to be studied between students who do not drop courses and those that do rather than only between the group that does drop.

It was found that students tend to stop attending classes before they officially withdraw. Most students reported that they stopped attending classes in weeks three, eight and fourteen. Over half of the students have already stopped attending class by the eight week while it isn't until the thirteenth week that half of them have officially dropped the class.

The marketing potential for students who have withdrawn from classes is still positive. There were 83% of the students who had dropped a course(s) who planned to return in the

future. Educational ratings were not a significant difference in whether students who dropped planned to return in the future.

Recommendations

Although the number of withdrawals at Schoolcraft are lower or the same as at other colleges, the College should consistently monitor the percentage of students who withdraw. The Grade Distribution report continues to provide the relevant data needed to monitor withdrawals.

The reasons that students drop courses have not greatly changed since 1988 and the literature indicates that the reasons students drop are fairly universal. The College may want to monitor reasons for withdrawals through the Registrar's Office. The Registrar has students complete a short survey when they drop a class.

Since most withdraws are outside the "control" of the College, the College should investigate ways to follow-up with students who have completely withdrawn to encourage them to continue study at Schoolcraft. The study indicated that 83% of the students in the study planned to enroll in the future. Knowing that students tend to stop attending classes in the third week and 33% drop by the eighth week, students may be encouraged by the Registrar's Office or by a phone call to register for an eight-week course that begins at mid-term.

Working students comprised 75% of the students in the study, with 40% working full-time. The College should continue to design courses and programs that can meet the busy schedules of working students. Weekend College courses, telecourses, and alternative study courses need to be expanded to meet the needs of this population.

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